

The Bethel Courier.

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Bethel Historical Society



Gardening at the Bethel Inn, ca. 1940. L-R: Margaret Joy Tibbetts, Frederick McMillin and Mary Tibbetts (Freeman).

OLD-TIME GARDENS AND SOME BETHEL GARDENERS

by Mary Tibbetts Freeman

EDITOR'S NOTE: This paper was presented at the May 1, 1975 Bethel Historical Society meeting and has been slightly edited for inclusion in this issue.

The first gardens in the New World of which there is record were planted in what is now the State of Maine. The English explorer James Rosier in "A True Relation of the Most Prosperous Voyage Made This Present Year 1605 by Captain George Weymouth," describes Monhegan Island as "woody, grown with firre, birch, and Oke and Beach, as far as we saw along the shore . . . on the verge grow gooseberries, strawberries, wild pease and wild rosebushes." And they also gardened: "Wednesday, the 22 of May, we . . . sowed pease and barley which in sixteen days grew eight inches above ground." Also early in the 17th century Samuel de Champlain established a settlement on an island in the St. Croix River and in the account of his voyages published in 1619 included not only a description of the settlement but a picture of it. In this picture garden beds are clearly shown for the several houses where, according to Champlain's account, were grown "sallets" and other vegetables to feed the settlers. These "sallets" so frequently mentioned in accounts of early gardens consisted of lettuce, sorrel, and other greens which were cooked and eaten with a dressing of oil and vinegar.

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SOCIETY PUBLISHES CEMETERY BOOK

The Society has published a book on Bethel cemeteries, recording inscriptions on gravestones from the earliest days through 1988. A project of more than a year in the making, the data for this volume has been painstakingly compiled by Mildred Jackson and Agnes Haines and features an interpretive overview by Society Director Stanley R. Howe. The 125 page paperback was printed by Smith and Town Printers of Berlin, NH on acid-free paper and contains an alphabetical listing of all known graves in Bethel's fifteen public and private burial grounds. Priced at \$9.50 (plus \$.48 Maine sales tax and \$1.50 for shipping) the book can be ordered by calling the Society office at (207) 824-2908 or writing the Society at P.O. Box 12, Bethel, Maine 04217.

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EDITOR'S CORNER

Several alert readers brought to my attention an error in the Fall 1988 issue of the COURIER in Margaret Joy Tibbetts' article on Grafton. The "Horseshoe" was on the Newry side of Screw Auger Falls, not beyond it as stated in the article. According to Roger and Amy Hanscom, it was buried when Route 26 was widened in the early 1980s.

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

On a beautiful Sunday afternoon the Society celebrated the 200th anniversary of the birth of Dr. Moses Mason. As I sat comfortably in the meeting room listening to Stan Howe's interesting overview of the high points in Dr. Mason's life, I began to wonder if the "good doctor" would have approved of all the attention which we have directed toward his life and career.

It did not take me very long to conclude that Moses Mason would have been very well satisfied with most of the ways in which his name has been remembered. This is so for a variety of reasons. Even practical Yankees have enough human vanity to enjoy seeing their names in print now and then. Dr. Mason certainly has had his share of public recognition since his house was opened to the public in 1974. I'm sure that he would also be pleased to know that his property as well as his good name have been preserved and even enhanced.

But I think that this "patriarch", as Director Howe referred to Dr. Mason, would have been most satisfied to know that the type of leadership he exemplified so well is still revered in Bethel generations after his death. This intangible quality of leadership and civic responsibility is the cornerstone of civilization. It is fitting that we commemorate the life and career of one of Bethel's most important citizens because when we do so we focus attention on that which is essential to any human community, namely the wise guidance of born leaders.

Marvin Ouwinga



Arlene Lowell

MEMBER PROFILE

Arlene D. Lowell

Arlene D. Lowell was born in Bethel, the daughter of Wilbur and Ruby Davis. She graduated from Gould Academy in 1944 and married Lloyd Lowell in 1945. She has two grown children and was active with her husband in his business ventures. Currently, she is also a volunteer at Telstar Regional High School.

A life member of the Society, she is very active as a volunteer on the Garden and Grounds Committee during the summer months and the remainder of the year in the Society's office and research room. She has also assisted at Society meetings and operated the Society gift shop.

Her hobbies include cross country skiing and crafts. She is a member of the West Bethel Union Church.

SOCIETY SALES DEPARTMENT

The Society maintains a selection of modestly priced gifts and historical publications. These may be ordered at the prices listed below. Maine residents should include 5% sales tax. Orders under \$10 should include \$1 for postage and handling; those over \$10 but under \$20 should include \$2 and all those over \$20 should include \$3 for postage and handling.

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Moses Mason House
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Bethel Historical Society Calendar, 1989 \$6

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IN MEMORIAM

Died in Rumford, May 14, 1989, age 97, Ralph Hall, the Society's oldest member. Mr. Hall presided over the Society's first meeting. A generous donor, he was a life and honorary member.

Died in Norway, June 14, 1989, Iva B. Hutchinson, member since 1979.

Died in Norway, June 20, 1989, Edward M. Quinn, former president and trustee of the Society and generous donor. Mr. Quinn headed the Society's Building Committee for many years.

A few years later Captain John Smith of Pocahontas fame planted a garden on an island off the coast of Maine. Proudly he wrote: "I made a garden upon the top of a Rockie Isle . . . 4 leagues from the Main in May, that grew so well, as it served us for sallets in June and July." He goes on to say, as part of his effort to encourage his readers to think well of this part of the world, that "the soil is so fertile that questionless it is capable of producing any grain, fruits, or seeds you will sow or plant And surely by reason of those sandy cliffs and cliffs of rocks, both of which we saw so planted with (Indian) gardens and corn fields . . . who can but approve this a most excellent place, both for health and fertility." (On these same coastal voyages Captain Smith gave the name Strawberry Bank to the spot where Portsmouth now stands.)

So from the beginning there has been a tradition of gardening in Maine. When the Puritans began to emigrate in substantial number in the 17th century, they knew that they faced a wilderness where they would have to grow most of their own food and other necessities of life as well. Next to a roof, a garden was the prime essential. And this absolute need determined the kind of gardens grown in Plymouth and rural New England. The last thing New Englanders needed were so-called "pleasure" gardens — gardens which required meticulous grooming and tending and which yielded nothing to be readily harvested "for meate and medicine." The requirements of the Puritan housewife were (and had to be) the deciding factors in the layout of the garden, its location, and what was grown in it. Tending the garden was one of the housewife's chief duties, and from the first, gardens in New England were planned and planted according to her needs and convenience.

In rural New England from Colonial times through the first half of the 19th century the form or character of gardens changed very little. This we know from pictures, sketches, and descriptions in letters and other records. In New England, there was no special planting for effect, as there was in the South where help was plentiful and circumstances differed. Each plant was selected for its usefulness rather than for any contribution it could make to over-all landscaping. Gardening was a serious matter. Fruit and/or usefulness generally determined plant material; few flowers were grown as such. Even the rose, as George Herbert tells us, served a medicinal function: "What is fairer than a rose? What is sweeter: Yet it purgeth."

In general gardens were of the "walk and bed" pattern. The beds were generally raised and often varied in size. Family need determined what plantings went in what size bed; not infrequently two different plants shared a bed. Large and small, tall or low-growing, all plants were planted and grown according to the gardener's convenience. Often the beds were edged with ribbon-grass, clove pinks, or lavender and although these plants might be used as decorative edging, they too had a more purposeful use. The walks and paths too were functional. Usually they were made of tamped soil and were narrow — just wide enough to walk through or to stand on for weeding or harvesting. A stone wall and/or wooden fence usually surrounded the garden, and this too was functional — to give protection from animals and also from the wind. An orchard frequently adjoined the herb-flower-vegetable-berry garden. Tall trees were generally placed at the outer edge or boundary of a property. Foundation plantings did not come into use until after the Civil War and marked the first real change in garden form. Initially, these took the form of front dooryard gardens — flower gardens planted between the house and the street, on either side of the front walk and enclosed by a fence. The fence usually extended directly from the sides of the house and ran

straight forward to the very edge of the sidewalk or street. These dooryard gardens were in full view of the parlors and of people approaching — and were immensely popular. Hardly a house did not have its front garden — and white wooden fence, picket or otherwise — and even today many houses in Bethel as well as in other New England towns, retain remnants of the front dooryard plantings — a lilac bush or two, some rose bushes, an oriental poppy, and several clumps of iris.

Bethel, in its garden practices as in other ways, reflected what was going on in the rest of New England. And Bethel, although it has never been distinguished as a garden center, has had its share of able gardeners and even botanists. Ada Twitchell Durell was an excellent gardener and botanist (the terms are not interchangeable and indeed the skills are seldom combined in one person). For many years Mrs. Durell's gardens gave beauty and interest to what is now called the Dr. Moses Mason House. Fortunately in the restoration Mrs. Durell's fern garden on the north side of the house has been preserved. At one time this garden contained all of the ferns native to Oxford County. Originally, a wild-flower garden featuring bloodroot, Jack-in-the Pulpit, Canadian Mayflower, and other shade-loving natives adjoined the fern garden.

Miss Phoebe M. Buxton, who lived in the house now occupied by Barbara Lucas, was a recognized botanist but not a gardener. Her cousin Anna Twitchell French was something of a botanist and something of a gardener, and the same is true of Alice French Smith. Both Mrs. French and Alice knew a great deal about plants, both native and non-native, and many of their plantings still persist around the old house on Church Street.

Dr. Nathaniel True was a gardener and fifty years ago when his daughter's house still stood on the southwest corner of Broad Street and Paradise, traces of his garden abounded in the spring when the daffodils were in bloom, and crocus, and the corner by the glassed-in entrance to the back-door (Dr. True's Greenhouse) was blue with squill. In the early years of the 20th century, Dr. Gehring brought many new trends in gardening to Bethel; he created a "rockery" in the best English tradition; he naturalized crocus and daffodils throughout the grounds; he planted specimen trees here and there for effect and landscape value; and planted an *allée* of spruces fronted on either side by an herbaceous border as an approach to a rustic summer house.

Judge Herrick also was a gardener, both flower and fruit and vegetable, as were Fred Merrill and Dr. E. L. Brown. Both Eugene (or "Long" Van as he was often called) and Alphonse Van Den Kerckhoven were gardeners — Al Van's interest were primarily peonies and iris — and so was Mr. Hanscom although on a more limited scale. Horace Annis for many years head gardener at Bethel Inn was a fine all-round plantsman. Mrs. Ellery Park was something of a gardener and for years one of the prettiest sights in Bethel in June was the red rambler rose blossoming on Mrs. Park's garden fence. Muriel Park Mason is an excellent gardener and as long as she was gardening in Bethel her place offered much to see and enjoy throughout the season. Pearl Ashby Tibbetts has been gardening on Main Street for more than 60 years, and from the first crocus to pumpkins on the doorstep at Halloween always has something of color and interest. Edith Thurston Brown was a very good gardener, and her garden on Lower Main Street, beside the fine old M. L. Thurston barn, was for many years one of Bethel's most attractive. It is good to see snowdrops blossoming there beside the entrance today.

In the greater Bethel area also there have been notable gardeners. In Locke Mills, Mabel Farrington loved all plants and flowers although the pond lily was her favorite. It is to her that we owe the first plantings of pond lilies, both white and the

colored, in the ponds adjoining that village. And certainly among the best if not the best gardener in the area was Mabel Abbott in East Bethel. Mabel's thumb was green clear to her shoulder. She knew a great deal about plants, was always very particular to grow a good form, and while not deserting the old favorites was always interested in trying out new plants. At the old Abbott place up on Swan hill, grape vines and rose bushes grew lavishly over stone walls and fences; poppies and peonies and lilies and phlox, hollyhocks and golden rod surrounded the house; and adjoining the houseplot were orchards and gardens. In later years Mabel's gardens at the farm on the East Bethel Road showed the same abundance. Asparagus and rugosa roses — and Mabel's famous "Black rose" — still grow close to the road opposite the house; hens and chickens still crowd one another around the doorsteps; and along the edge of the road by the garden, each year a few self-tended gloriosa daisies still call to mind Mabel's brilliant patch of color.

NEW LIFE MEMBERS

LELAND and BARBARA BROWN, Bethel, are 1948 graduates of Gould Academy. Mr. Brown is employed by Boise Cascade; Mrs. Brown works at Casco Northern Bank. She chairs the Society's Membership Committee and serves on the Endowment Campaign Committee. EARLENE CHADBOURNE, North Saco, is an avid genealogist and the wife of Society life member Theodore Chadbourne. RODNEY and ANN HACKWELL, North Easton, MA, are retired. He is a 1930 graduate of Gould Academy. ALICE L. OYLER, San Clemente, CA, has ties with several Bethel families. HELEN ROSS STALEY, Pasadena, MD, is a descendant of Rev. Daniel Mason of Bethel. MURRAY and CONSTANCE THURSTON, Bethel, live in a new house overlooking the mountains. He is president of J. A. Thurston Company, Inc. and she is a guide in the Dr. Moses Mason House Museum.

LAND OF NORUMBEGA SERIES HELD IN BETHEL

The Bethel Historical Society served as host for the first in a series of programs on the Land of Norumbega to be held in Bethel. Sponsored by the Maine Library Association and the Maine State Library, with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, this public outreach program was sponsored locally by the Bethel Historical Society and the Bethel Library. Participants were furnished with a number of works relating to exploration and settlement in Maine and various discussion leaders added their perspective to the series.



Society Curator of Collections Randall H. Bennett (L) discusses with Helen A. Morton of the Society's Art Committee the White Mountain painting recently received from the State Museum. Photo courtesy of Donald S. Brown.

SOCIETY ACQUIRES WHITE MOUNTAIN PAINTING

A fine White Mountain landscape depicting an autumn vista of Washington and Adams from the Saco River Valley has been donated to the Bethel Historical Society. Attributed to the artist James William Welch (1827-1895) of Augusta, Maine, and New York City, this 19th century oil on canvas was presented to the Society by the Maine State Museum through the efforts of Society Curator Randall H. Bennett and Maine State Museum Director Paul Rivard.

Since Bethel is considered a "White Mountain town" and the collections of the Society contain materials relating to Western Maine and the White Mountains, the painting is a welcome addition to the Dr. Moses Mason House.

BOOK REVIEW

MAINE IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC. Edited by Charles E. Clark, James S. Leamon & Karen Bowden. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1988. Pp. 258. \$29.95.)

Prior to statehood, Maine existed primarily as an outpost of Massachusetts. In the twelve essays contained in this book, which resulted from the Maine Humanities Council project "Maine at Statehood: The Forgotten Years, 1783-1820," much of the period covered by the late Ronald Banks' seminal work MAINE BECOMES A STATE (1970) is examined in some detail. Essays discussing Maine's changing landscape, growth of towns, urban domestic planning, religious fervor, medicine and art are among the subjects discussed in this important book.

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(Book Review, continued from page 7)

Well-illustrated with a variety of photographs (some in full color) of paintings, decorative arts objects and maps, this volume extends contemporary understanding of the four decades of Maine history since the American War of Independence. During this era, the District's population more than quadrupled; social, political, and economic forces were in constant flux. Problems such as deforestation, squatter rebellions protesting eviction by distant landowners, and political strife between the District and its parent state are analyzed. Also receiving attention are the innovations and cultural developments of the era, ranging from architectural innovations to artistic expressions of gifted settlers.

The book includes essays by some of the most notable contemporary scholars of Maine's past and each chapter's text is followed by extensive end notes for those wishing further insight into the sources consulted. Readers of the *COURIER* will find of particular interest a discussion of Bethel as an inland Maine town, typical of the era. Also included are photos of the Chester Harding portrait of Dr. Moses Mason and the original plan of the town.

This is a highly significant book and one that will be of use for those interested in Maine's past before statehood for years to come.

SRH

REFLECTIONS OF A HALF CENTURY

(continued from the last issue)

By Leslie E. Davis

During the summer of 1920 after we finished running the sawmill I helped my father with the farm work and at odd times I put up a log house on the old cellar foundations at the Eli Stearns farm where M. L. Thurston formerly lived and the house had burned. We got it closed in but not finished. I believe we stayed in it for a little while during the late summer.

In the fall of 1921, my father decided that he could not handle the farm alone after we had talked it all out. I expect it was the result of the difference in ages. I was young and rather

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ambitious and wanted to build a new barn and expand our farming activities. He being nearly sixty years old dreaded the idea of borrowing money which would have been necessary to do the things I wanted to accomplish.

I took over the operation of J. P. Skillings' birch sawmill again; after doing some repair work in October we started sawing about the first of November, Clarence Judkins was handling the logging job on the old Wilber farm woodlot. We cut and sawed about 1000 cords during that winter. Marie ran the mill boarding house again. We furnished board and lodging for the men for \$6 per week. Her brother, Porter, was the fireman and engineer at the mill. During one of the sawmill jobs at Skillings mill, I accidentally sawed off about half of the forefinger and badly injured the lower joint of the middle finger of my left hand. I am not sure whether it was the year 1920 or 1921, but I do remember that it happened on March 20. Earl took me to Bethel in his Model T Ford touring car to Dr. I. H. Wight who dressed it. Dr. Wight advised taking off the balance of the middle finger as the joint was badly mangled, but I persuaded him to leave it on and we managed to get a pretty good finger out of it.

(to be continued in the next issue)

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